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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

13 February 1980

MEMORANDUM

WEST GERMANY: RELATIONS WITH THE USSR []

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Summary

With the approval of the Western allies, detente and Ostpolitik have become the cornerstones of West German foreign policy during the past decade. West Germany's relations with the Soviet Union and East Germany are at the heart of Ostpolitik, although it also includes West German connections to the other countries of Eastern Europe.

Ostpolitik does not dominate West German foreign policy to the extent it did from 1969 to 1974 under Chancellor Willy Brandt. Nevertheless, it remains national policy, accepted in principle by the opposition, and no West German chancellor can afford to ignore the effect of any foreign policy decision on West Germany's relations with the East.

Should the opposition win this fall's election, the emphasis of Ostpolitik would be altered. But the opposition, once in power, would accept the basic treaties with the Eastern countries worked out under Brandt, seek an improvement in personal contacts with East Germans, and eschew confrontation with the Soviet Union. []

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This memorandum, requested by the Department of the Treasury was prepared by [] the Western Europe Division, Office of Political Analysis. Research was completed on 8 February. The paper was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for Western Europe. Questions and comments may be addressed to the Chief, Northern Europe Branch, Western Europe Division, Office of Political Analysis []

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Good working relations with the Soviet Union are essential to West German security for several reasons: West Germany's geographic location on the dividing line between East and West in Europe, its political and economic development since World War II, and the presence of Soviet troops in East Germany. The division of Germany into two states, one of which is militarily occupied and politically dominated by the USSR, inextricably links Bonn's policy toward East Germany with the climate of West German-Soviet relations. []

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Although the goal of German reunification is no longer viewed as an immediate West German objective, it remains embedded in West German policy. Reunification is an abiding hope of large numbers of citizens in both Germanies, as well as the stated aim of a vocal minority in the West. Proponents of reunification-as well as "realists" who see it as a distant goal--agree that it is achievable only with the acquiescence of the Soviet Union. The belief that Soviet acquiescence is essential to German reunification helps explain the broad support in West Germany for good relations with the USSR. []

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West Germany's exposed position within easy striking range of both Soviet ground forces in East Germany and Soviet weapons in the USSR gives strategic importance to West German relations with the Soviet Union. To achieve security as a border state between East and West, West Germany must overcome Eastern fears of renewed aggression by a militarily and economically resurgent German nation. This is a continuing aim of the government's detente policy, which also attempts to induce the Soviet Union and its allies to improve political and economic relations with West Germany. []

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In spite of occasional Soviet charges of hostile West German intent toward the East, the West Germans have to a degree managed to allay Soviet suspicions of a revival of German militarism. West German insistence that NATO theater nuclear force modernization be accompanied by a parallel arms control effort is a recent example of Bonn's efforts to maintain the security it has thus far achieved in its relationship with the Soviet Union. West Germany's caution in reacting to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is another example. Bonn's future approach to NATO issues will likewise aim at strengthening the West German image as a loyal but peace-loving and detente-minded member of the Alliance. []

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West Berlin is a particularly sensitive point in Soviet-West German relations. The status and security of the city remain an Allied responsibility, but West Germany's economic and cultural ties with West Berlin are so strong that no West German politician would dare sacrifice them. Bilateral agreements with the Soviet Union on legal aid, scientific and technical cooperation, and cultural exchanges have been held up for years because of the two sides' inability to agree on wording that would extend coverage to West Berlin. []

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West German officials are painfully aware that the Soviets and their East German surrogates can apply considerable pressure to West Berlin. Although the West German government does not believe the USSR wants to provoke a crisis over Berlin, Bonn must consider this possibility in contemplating any action against the Soviet Union.

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